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STATEMENT BY LA LECHE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL

Nutrition goals and strategies for children in the 1990s

1. La Leche League is committed to the "Enhancement of children's health and nutrition" as stated in paragraph 10 of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted by the Summit for Children. This is the first duty, as well as a task, for which solutions are now within reach. The lives of tens of thousands of boys and girls can be saved every day because the causes of death are readily preventable. Child and infant mortality is unacceptably high in many parts of world, but can be lowered dramatically with means that are already known and easily accessible. 1/

2. La Leche League is committed to the major goals set forth in the Declaration and in the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Chidlren in the 1990s. One of the major goals adopted for children in the 1990s specifically deals with breast-feeding: "Empowerment of all women to breast-feed their children exclusively for four to six months and to continue breast-feeding, with complementary food, well into the second year." 2/

3. Breast-feeding is a primary factor in the enhancement of children's health and nutrition. "Breast-feeding has advantages for both babies and mothers, and the advantages are seen in rich and poor nations. They include the prevention of gastrointestinal and respiratory illness, and of infections as well as certain immunologic disorders. In addition to preventing illness early in life, breast-feeding appears to reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases as well. It has advantages for the premature as well as the full-term infant." 3/

4. One of the major goals for child survival, development and protection in the 1990s states: "Between 1990 and the year 2000, reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-5 children by half." 2/ La Leche League believes that breast milk is an unequalled complete food for the healthy growth of infants. The breast-feeding provides optimal nourishment for infants. It is a critical factor in child survival programmes and can save both infant lives and health costs. The achievement of nutritional goals for children requires that breast-feeding must be protected, promoted and supported.

5. La Leche League recommends to the UNICEF Executive Board that:

(a) UNICEF take the lead internationally to promote a shift from a bottle-feeding culture to a breast-feeding culture. This shift will occur only with a commitment to utilize all channels of communication and the necessary resources;

(b) UNICEF use the Convention on the Rights of the Child to support activities that educate parents about the importance of breast-feeding, and enable them to act on this knowledge;

(c) UNICEF remain committed to doing what is practicable for children, including the immunization of all children, and the empowerment of mothers to breast-feed;

(d) UNICEF support the broad base of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in protecting, promoting and supporting breast-feeding in order to meet the goals set forth in the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breast-feeding;

(e) UNICEF support NGOs such as La Leche League in their efforts to strengthen the mother support group concept, which is instrumental in prolonging the duration of breast-feeding;

(f) UNICEF commit resources for publication and translation of materials for the expansion of mother support groups internationally, for training leaders and health care workers in breast-feeding management;

(g) UNICEF encourage Governments to preserve and encourage breast-feeding as a natural resource by supporting breast-feeding management programmes. "The Governments recognition of the value of breast-feeding and the use of breast milk as a natural global resource can help to stop the downward trend in breast-feeding and ensure the conservation of other natural global resources."; 4/

(h) UNICEF promote the education of girls so that the future mothers of the world will have the information they will need and the confidence to breast-feed their children. "Such education involves the removal of constraints and influences that manipulate perceptions and behaviour towards breast-feeding, often by subtle and indirect means. This requires

sensitivity, continued vigilance and a responsive and comprehensive communications strategy involving all media and addressed at all levels of society."; 5/

(i) UNICEF take the lead in promoting breast-feeding at the workplace. "Obstacles to breast-feeding within the health system, the workplace and the community must be eliminated."; 5/

(j) UNICEF take the lead in encouraging Governments and health workers to use and practise the 10 steps outlined in the "Joint UNICEF/WHO Statement on Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breast-feeding", given the fact that the first hours and days after birth are so critical in establishing a successful breast-feeding relationship;

(k) UNICEF acknowledge that breast-feeding is a first step in protecting the integrity and value of the family unit. During the International Year of the Family the value of breast-feeding as an important factor in the attachment process and reciprocal bonding between infant to mother should be promoted. UNICEF should recognize publicly that there is a link between instability in families and the problems that they seek to solve.

Notes

1/ World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, World Summit for Children, United Nations, 30 September 1990 (A/45/625), annex, p. 2.

2/ Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, World Summit for Children, United Nations, 30 September 1990 (A/45/625), annex, appendix.

3/ Alan Cunningham, Derrick Jellife and Patrice Jellife. "Breast-feeding and Health in the 1980s: A Global Epidemiologic Review", Journal of Pediatrics, 1991 in press.

4/ Joanna Koch. "Breast-feeding is a Global Natural Resource", statement to the Planning Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1 February 1991.

5/ "Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breast-feeding", WHO/UNICEF policy meeting, Florence, Italy, 1 August 1990.